

The Poor Man's Answer to the Rich Associators.*

Who art thou, that thou should'st be afraid of a Man that shall die, and of the Son of Man that shall be made as grass, and forgettest THE LORD, THY MAKER?—Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their Sins.—Isaiah.

He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his Neighbour cometh and searcheth him.—Solomon.

WHEREAS, great numbers of advertisements have lately appeared in the public papers, representing the British Empire to be at present in a free, prosperous, and happy condition; and whereas it appears to the author of this paper, that the situation of a great multitude of its inhabitants is slavish, beggarly, and wretched,—he therefore thinks it his duty—as a Man—an Englishman—and *above all* as a believer and rejoicer in the missions of Moses and of Jesus Christ, thus publicly to declare his sentiments of the present state of the Nation; that if it please God, he may be a means of good both to the poor and the rich; for as extortion drives the poor and afflicted into many crimes and punishments,—so, on the other hand, the dishonest, unchristian, oppressive wealth of the rich, drowns them in pride, covetousness, idleness, luxury, pleasure, and everlasting perdition.

Neither does he think that his having published the substance of what he now advances, several times before; is a sufficient reason why he should be silent: but on the contrary, he apprehends that so long as wicked, selfish, or mistaken men oppress, and endeavour to deceive, it is the duty of every christian, so far as his ability or influence extends, to furnish an antidote, and bear a testimony for mercy and truth:—certainly, the longest labor will be short, and the heaviest sufferings light, to him who *sees and knows* the God and Father of Jesus Christ!

• Whose pretence is to preserve liberty and property—but whose real aim seems to be to persuade the Nation, that if the government make laws which allow honest, labouring men to have only *half so much* food and raiment as their forefathers had, they ought to be contented and happy with it—in order that the Associators may have double the quantity that their ancestors had!

As a protest, therefore, against the assertions of our present freedom, prosperity and happiness, which have been lately so profusely and publicly made, the following selection of circumstances is produced, as *part* of our National evils and grievances.

I.

The very imperfect state of Parliamentary representation;—the major part of the nation not being represented *at all*;—the *time* for which members are returned being more than double the length it ought to be,—and the *qualification* or property required by the present law in a representative, being such as wholly excludes most of the best judges of the state and necessities of the poor from any share in legislation.

II.

The great neglect of proper instruction and education among poor children in general;—their parents not being *able*; and the clergy, whose proper business it is to see after it or do it, not being *willing*; and the *civil government* seeming to think it a matter of little consequence;—they are therefore left an easy prey to the original baseness of *human nature*—to the necessities of *hard times*—and to the temptations and snares spread for them by such *as* have already begun a course of *actual* wickedness.

III.

The enormous, intollerable load of duties and taxes;—which is a means of bringing many to wretched ends, by driving them to delusive, dangerous methods of keeping pace with their expences; such as trading upon a paper (bill or note) capital, advertising and ticketing goods under price, selling by Auction, travelling and keeping fairs at great expences, &c. &c. which ways often lead to insolvencies, drunkenness, whoredom, swindling, smuggling, coining, forgery, theft, robbery, —ruin ! both in this world and the next. *

* Gentlemen, for God's sake, for your own sakes, and for the sake of the Nation in general, divide the farms and commons, &c. and let the deserving poor have small parcels of land *to dig*, at reasonable rents.—Cut up *the very roots* of felony and wickedness in general, by *thus* raising a standard for the support, encouragement, and reward of sobriety, honesty, industry, and a well-govern'd, orderly family; that by this means, and the blessing of God, the rapid increase of insolvencies, poor-rates, transportations, and executions, &c may be not only *stopped*, but even reduced far below the experience of *former* times, or the *present state* of neighbouring Nations.—May the good, Almighty God say. Amen.?

The excessive height of rents; and the monopoly of lands, or letting *large* farms;—which bad custom crowds trade, and especially *Shopkeeping*, in an insupportable manner; and also hinders the produce of the necessaries of life; which might be rais'd in double quantities upon *small* divisions of land, at *reasonable* rents.

V.

The great quantity of uncultivated ground, lying in forests, moors and commons;—which if divided into small parcels and cultivated, wou'd employ and comfortably maintain many thousands of families more than at present; to the *national* benefit as well as *their own*, both in body and mind.

VI.

The great disproportion between the rates or wages of labor, and the prices of necessaries, or the expences of living, among the majority of the working-people in this kingdom;—which has been gradually increasing for many years past, and drives great numbers to prisons, transportation, and the gallows.

VII.

The excessive number of Horses, especially Coach, Chaise, Hunting, and Race Horses;—which may truly be said to live upon the flesh of the poor!—as to the immense, burdensome number of *Waggon* Horses at present employ'd upon the roads, I cannot immediately recollect a better way of lessening it than for the government to promote and encourage by all proper, reasonable, and possible means, the spirit of inland-navigation:—and I heartily wish that the ox and the spade might be substituted for very many of the horses at present us'd even in *husbandry*.

VIII.

The exclusive privileges, franchises, or charters, possessed by many trades, and corporations, &c;—which often prevents distressed men from getting a living in some other trade or place, when their own fails; and is therefore a means of bringing families upon the parish, or to worse expedients.

IX.

The present mode of levying or raising the poor-rates according to rents;—which bears much too hard upon

the poorer sort of housekeepers and tradesmen; many an honest man who is striving hard to pay his debts, or keep his family from the parish, which perhaps he can scarcely do, is yet obliged to pay as large a poor-rate as some of his neighbours who are worth hundreds or thousands of pounds:—rates ought to be laid upon real or personal estates, or *own* property, and not upon rents.

X.

The present state of the poor-laws and workhouses;—many a poor person (and sometimes too when death is near) being dragg'd from a place where he has been settled many years, to one where he has neither friend nor acquaintance, nor any prospect of employment in case of recovery: and all he has to expect is confinement in a workhouse, where he must be denied some sorts of food which by custom are perhaps become almost as necessary to him as a shirt or a coat:—Many also among the working people or lower sorts of tradesmen who have lived in a sober, cleanly, decent, quiet manner, being by a large family, sickness, want of work, decay of trade, losses, old age, &c. reduced to the parish, have no alternative but either to starve at home, or be *confined* in the workhouse with a noisy, dirty, profligate company; and perhaps put 2 or 3 or 4 into one bed, and half a dozen or half a score such bed-fulls in one room;—oftentimes farm'd out to be provided with food and cloathing at 2s. 6d. or 3s. a head per week, and made to work when humanity or mercy points to *rest* in age, and to *education* in childhood.—and under this head may be mentioned the very great want there is, especially in London, of an institution for the relief or reception of poor, distressed *foreigners*, and also Scotch and Irish; the want of which is *alone* sufficient to deprive the nation of its boasted character of mercy or charity.

XI.

The Tythe and Church-rate laws, and the penal statutes existing against honest, consciencious dissenters; which are utterly contrary to the freedom ordained by the law of Christ, and have a great tendency to destroy peace of mind, and turn a sincere man into a hypocrite.

The existence of the slave trade ;—which is not only productive, as hath been publicly and fully proved, of much misery and wretchedness and destruction in Africa and the West-Indies ; but is also the cause of a great weight of sorrow here in England ; some who (in part at least) have left off the use of sugar, on account of the channel it comes by, having found by experience that custom has made it to them as desirable as any other article of food which they make use of ; and more especially as the production of honey has been so much neglected that it is now not to be got as a substitute for sugar, either as to quantity or price, for poor people.

If I had time and ability, it were easy to swell this complaint to a great length by a catalogue of *real* evils and grievances, which now exist in this kingdom—Lotteries—the national debt and the practice of Funding—Press Warrants—Excise—inadequate pay of private Soldiers—wretched, inhuman state of the prisons*—intolerable expence and tediousness of suits at Law, which utterly exclude many poor from justice—the pride, covetousness, idleness, and flatteries of the clergy—the encouragement given by government to addresses and congratulations, &c. and the discouragement to petitions or complaints—the frequent *want of work* among the poor in many parts of the kingdom, which might easily be remedied by dividing farms and commons, &c.

Oh! Legislators, how many mouths might you have saved from cursing and imprecation—how many backs from stripes—how many drunkards from the public-house—how many prostitutes from the brothel and the street—how many necks from the gallows—how many aching hearts from crossing the Ocean, never to return,—in short, how many poor wretches, ruined both in body, soul, and circumstances—a curse to themselves and to every one about them—might have pass'd their days in credit and comfort, and with benefit to the community,
and

* In December last James Mac Curdy a sober, honest, poor man, was sent to Clerkenwell Bridewell for selling a publication like this ; where in 2 or 3 weeks he lost his life, before he was brought into Court ; and I am persuaded that his death was occasioned by the mere want of necessary food and lodging, &c.—is not this murder ?

and blessings to yourselves, if you had taken as much pains to cultivate, improve and reward—truth, wisdom, honesty, sobriety, industry, goodness—in short, **CHRISTIANITY**—as you have to procure the pleasures, honors, or profits of which in a few years you must give up the possession, and perhaps even with a wish that you had never had it !

O King and Maker of Heaven and Earth ! Father of Jesus Christ, behold how Thy material, sensitive, and rational creations are destroyed by the pride, cruelty, covetousness, luxury, and idleness of our teachers and governors ! they have been chastened and warned, but they refuse to hear either Thy rod, or the voice of their poor, oppressed brethren.—Oh ! look upon the affliction and the misery that is in this Empire, and throughout Europe, and pour out Thy spirit of grace and supplication upon us sufferers, that we may turn from sin, and cry unto Thee in a language which Thou wilt accept ! Our eyes are upon Thy mercy, O Lord of Kings and Rulers ! let it be seen that Thou art the same now as in the days of Moses and of Jesus Christ ; when Thou scatteredst the proud, and put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree !

By the laws of God and reason every sober, honest, industrious man has a right to marry ;—and if he takes a wife at the most proper and natural time of life, he may reasonably expect a child every year for several years :—now suppose a man to have 6 or 8 children in as many years, what right has he to expect any help from his wife towards maintaining herself or them, during that time ?—is not the bearing and care of the children, together with the various labours of making, mending, and washing of cloaths ; dressing food ; keeping the house and bedding clean, &c. &c. a *sufficient* work for *her* ?—neither ought any support to be expected from the *children* at that age, especially in a country the national religion of which makes it the duty of every individual to learn and read the Scriptures, the proper age to begin which is childhood.

Suppose next that such a man earns 9s. a week constantly, (excluding any loss by sickness, bad weather, want of work, &c. although thousands, yea I believe many

many

many ten thousands of hard-working men do not earn more than from 6s. to 8s. a week) if we deduct 1s. a week for rent, 1s. a week for firing and candles, and three halfpence a day for bread to each, one with another, we shall find his whole earnings swallowed up, without the least reserve for cloathing, bedding, furniture, flesh-meat, cheese, butter, beer, soap, tea, or sugar, &c.

If it be asked how the deficiency is made up when labouring men of 6 or 9s. a week wages do get families of 6 or 8 small children, and notwithstanding get *some* sort of cloathing, bedding, and furniture, &c. &c. I answer, that stealing, robbing, begging, oppressive and unequal poor-rates, excessive labor, neglected education, vagabond children, an uninformed mind, a starved weakened body, a deserted God, a bartered conscience, are some of the circumstances which unriddle the mystery.

In a scriptural sense of the word, I believe this land flows with human blood, and is filled with murders:—multitudes may perhaps be pronounced among the murdered before they are *begotten*, by the hindrances of marriage, arising from the difficulty of providing for a family;—and many I believe may be said to be murdered before they are *born*, by the want of necessaries and hard-labor undergone by their mothers; and thousands of working-men have their lives greatly shortened by the excessive quantity of strong liquor which they drink to support 'em under a labour too great for a human being;—and many men, women and children, are killed by mere fatigue, and cold, and hunger, and grief;—and I have also no doubt but many of those who are brought to an untimely end by imprisonment, transportation, the gallows, suicidism, whoredom, and war, &c. are in the book of the righteous JUDGE of all the earth, set down as murdered!—and I am further persuaded that the cruelty exercised to the brute creation (especially horses) in this Kingdom, is a very great addition to the account of our sins:—indeed the immense number of horses is a curse to both poor and rich; for they eat up the land which shou'd feed the poor, and the keeping, encouraging, or permitting so many of 'em is a heavy sin upon the heads of the rich.

A few words more—to all who fear God, and especially those who take upon themselves the office of guides or teachers.—Remember, that God is no respecter of persons, but that an ungodly *rich* man shall as surely perish as an ungodly *poor* one,—that pride, covetousness, oppression, extortion, pleasure, luxury, and uncharitableness, are as certain, true, real marks of an ungodly, wicked man; as theft, robbery, rebellion, drunkenness, profane swearing, or whoredom.—That necessary food and raiment &c. is one part of the promises of God; or the charter of a christian; and therefore to be endeavoured for by all lawful means; which means extend to laying the case of the poor or oppressed before the rich and powerful, as well as relieving them, when able, out of our own substance.—That as the influence of the great is more extensive, and their situation more responsible than others; so it seems reasonable, and the *duty* of servants of God, and preachers of righteousness, to use their utmost endeavours to correct the vices and heal the errors and cleanse the corruptions of Rulers and Governors, whether temporal or spiritual.

May the God and Father of Moses and of Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and the rest of the prophets of the old testament;* and of Jesus Christ and his Apostles and Saints of the new testament,* pour out a glorious portion of His holy Spirit upon the present generation!—Alas, it is a time of great leanness, blindness, nakedness, and wretchedness! but He who can turn darkness into light, and is able even out of stones to raise up faithful sons and daughters of Abraham, can make a Nation of spiritual [*real*] Kings and Priests, even in this degenerate time and country!—Amen; even so come, by Thine holy Spirit, Lord God of Almighty Power and Wisdom and Glory and Mercy and Love and Happiness, for Thy Mercy's Sake! So prays one who, *thus*, for many years has been a faithful Subject to the government, and a friend to both poor and rich,

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THOMAS BENTLEY.

* Who were not afraid to speak the truth to their Rulers, however harsh or seditious it might seem, or whatever might be the consequence to themselves.

